



**Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of Texas**

Donald J. DeGabrielle, Jr. • United States Attorney

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MAY 9, 2006

WWW.USDOJ.GOV/USAO/TXS

JOHN YEMBRICK

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

(713) 567-9388

**LAST OF "TARNISHED BADGES" DEFENDANTS
SENTENCED TO LENGTHY PRISON TERM**

Operation Tarnished Badges nabbed former elected Constable of Cameron County's Precinct 7

BROWNSVILLE, TX – The last of a total of five defendants charged as a result of "Operation Tarnished Badges" for their involvement in a drug trafficking enterprise involving the former elected Constable of Cameron County Precinct 7 was sentenced to more than 24 years in federal prison, United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle announced today. Ramon Montoya, 32, of Brownsville, was sentenced on Thursday, May 4, 2006, by United States District Judge Hilda Tagle to 292 months in federal prison, without parole, for smuggling the equivalent of over 32,000 kilograms of marijuana into the United States and transporting the illicit loads to points north over the course of one year. Montoya, who was determined to have occupied a leadership role in the enterprise, was convicted of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute more than 1,000 kilograms of marijuana after pleading guilty on January 31, 2006.

Montoya's conviction is the result of a three year Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation that focused on the illicit drug trafficking activity of some of the Constables of Cameron County Precinct 7, including the elected Constable of Precinct 7, Jose Alfredo Jimenez. Jimenez, two of his then deputies, Juan Contreras and Benito Villarreal, and Jose A. Morales were convicted in August 2002 by a jury's verdicts on various drug trafficking and firearms offenses.

Evidence at that trial showed that Jimenez and his deputy constables, Contreras and Villarreal, while on patrol in their official vehicles, picked up several loads of narcotics at the Rio Grande River on behalf of Morales. The contraband was then transported to the Constable's Office where Montoya would arrange for the loads to be picked up and ultimately transported to points north. Montoya was assessed a leader/organizer role, leading to an ultimate sentence of 292 months.

Jimenez, who was convicted of conspiracy, two counts of possessing with intent to distribute large kilogram loads of marijuana, is presently serving a life sentence in federal prison, without parole, for these offenses to be followed by a mandatory five year prison term for the carrying of a firearm during the commission of the drug offense conviction.

Juan Contreras, who was likewise convicted of the conspiracy, two counts of possession

with intent to distribute kilogram quantities of marijuana, was sentenced to 292 months in federal prison for the drug trafficking convictions. However, Contreras was also convicted of two counts of carrying a firearm during the commission of the drug offenses. The first conviction carries a mandatory minimum sentence of 60 months in prison to be served after the completion of the drug offense sentence. The second conviction mandates a mandatory 25-year prison term also to be served consecutive to all of the other sentences. Contreras is serving a total of 652 months, or more than 54 years in federal prison for his convictions.

Benito Villareal, who was convicted only of possession with intent to distribute 375 pounds of marijuana, is serving 136 months in federal prison for his role in the conspiracy.

Morales is serving 30 years in federal prison, without parole, for his role in the conspiracy and three drug trafficking offenses involving more than 2000 pounds of marijuana.

This case was investigated by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drug Enforcement Administration, United States Border Patrol and the Cameron County Sheriff's Office, and was the product of OCDETF Case Tarnished Badges. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Jody L. Young and Jesse Rodriguez.

#